



## DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Marc Elrich  
*County Executive*

Raymond L. Crowel, Psy.D.  
*Director*

January 17, 2023

The Honorable Evan Glass  
President, Montgomery County Council  
Council Office Building  
100 Maryland Avenue, 6th Floor  
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Council President Glass and Councilmembers,

The Montgomery County Mental Health Advisory Committee (MHAC) is writing in support of Supplemental Appropriation to FY23 Operating Budget -DHHS - 988 Lifeline Call Center - \$720,038 and Designation of Entities for Non-Competitive Contract Award Status: EveryMind, Inc.

MHAC was established to advise the Montgomery County Executive and the County Council on matters concerning mental health. Our work includes providing citizen oversight to all state-funded mental health agencies serving Montgomery County and serving as an advocate for a comprehensive mental health system for persons of all ages. The Committee helps to ensure that publicly-funded mental health services are responsive to local needs, accountable to the citizenry and accessible to those in need.

Earlier this year, MHAC former Chair, Helga Luest met with the County Council to share our FY24 priorities. *The County Council strongly encouraged MHAC to explore opportunities to expand prevention and community connectedness related to mental health needs* We have developed a subcommittee to explore this and want to share three key findings:

- **The 988 lifeline supports crisis and prevention** – 988 is a ground-breaking free resource that not only serves individuals in crisis but also provides a prevention component by connecting individuals with other important intervention, treatment and stabilization/recovery resources.
- **A positive experience is critical for this community** – Historically, individuals with mental health and substance use disorders have a distrust of systems which have failed them. Their “first impression” of county services - which will often be 988 - could be life-saving and also influence their willingness to continue engagement with other services and resources.
- **Our county’s diversity has additional needs** – Community connectedness means inclusiveness and ensuring that all residents can access 988, which includes accommodations for non-English speaking residents. While, there are mechanisms in

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7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 600 • Rockville, Maryland 20855 • 240-777-1432 • 240-777-4447 FAX

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place for this, there is a need to expand this capability to ensure that this access is equitable, regardless of the residents native language.

Dr. John Palmieri, Acting Director for 988 at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) describes the building of the 988 and crisis continuum as a “marathon not a sprint.” This additional funding will help in continuing on this journey to ensure that all Montgomery County residents benefit from this transformative service and that the dedicated hotline staff have the training, resources, and compensation they deserve.

We strongly urge you support this bill and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Susan Kerin, Chair

